DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 174 EC 304 604

AUTHOR	Shapiro-Barnard, Susan; And Others
TITLE	The Lighter Side of IEPs.
INSTITUTION	New Hampshire Univ., Durham. Inst. on Disability.
SPONS AGENCY	New Hampshire State Dept. of Education, Concord.; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	93
CONTRACT	H086J80011-89; H158A1003-91
NOTE	57p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disabilities; Educational Planning; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidelines; *Humor; *Individualized Education Programs; Meetings; Program Development; Student Participation; Teamwork

ABSTRACT

This booklet offers a humorous perspective on important guidelines for developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities which respect the values of collaboration, student and family leadership, and full inclusion. Humorous section titles and cartoons illustrate important principles: "Developing an IEP Shouldn't Be Like Planning Someone Else's Vacation," which addresses the necessity for student involvement in the IEP process; "Writing an IEP Shouldn't Be Like Five Decorators Furnishing Your Living Room," which emphasizes that IEP team members need to communicate and work together toward a common goal; "Reading IEP Goals Shouldn't Be Like Reading the Manual for Programming Your VCR," which points out that IEPs should be free of jargon, use easily understandable language, and not be too long; "IEP Meetings Shouldn't Be Like Large Family Reunions," which contends that the group should not be too large and all participants should know the student and each other; "Completed IEPs Shouldn't Be Like Exercise Equipment," which stresses that IEPs should be used; and "And Now Presenting the Perfect IEP...," which states that there is no perfect IEP. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

The Lighter Side Of IEPs

ED 392 174

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EC 300 164

University of New Hampshire

The Lighter Side of IEPs

written by:
Susan Shapiro-Barnard
Carol Tashie
Ann Donoghue Dillon
Mary Schuh
Cheryl Jorgensen
Beth Dixon
Jan Nisbet

cartoons by:
Trevor Romain

Institute on Disability/UAP
University of New Hampshire
1993

Four grant-funded projects have contributed to this book: the Statewide Systems Change Project, a five-year project funded by the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education (Grant #H086J80011-89), awarded to the New Hampshire Special Education Bureau for an inclusive education project, the New Hampshire Inservice Training Project, and Partnerships for Inclusion: New Hampshire's Training and Technical Assistance Project, both funded by the New Hampshire Department of Education, and Turning Points: New Hampshire's Transition Initiative, a five-year project funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education (Grant #H158A1003-91), awarded to the New Hampshire Department of Education. The contents of this book do not necessarily represent the policy or position of the U.S. Department of Education.

Introduction

The face of education is changing. Students with disabilities are moving out of segregated schools and classrooms, and into regular classrooms in their neighborhood schools. Professionals are moving out of their isolated roles as experts and into new roles marked by teamwork and collaboration. These changes are born of a concerted rethinking about equity, about excellence, and about the value of including *all* students in regular education.

*I*nclusive education provides educators and parents with many answers, but it presents new questions as well. How do the systems and structures of the past fit with the philosophy and beliefs of the present? How do we throw away out-dated educational structures but save what is valuable? How can we remain true to our values, as well as the rules and regulations we must follow? And finally, how can the IEP process help parents and professionals work together to fully support students to participate and learn in the regular classroom?

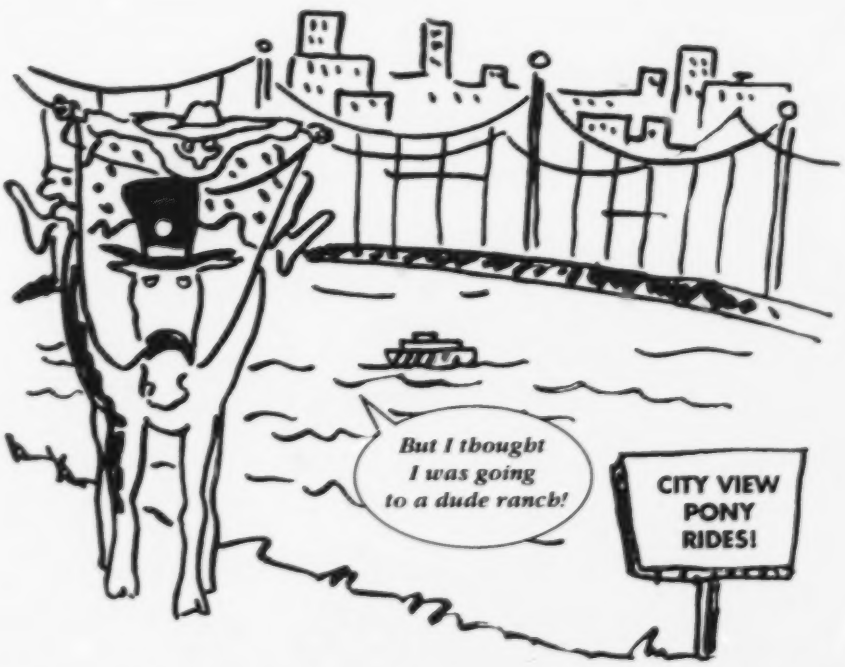
The current thinking about Individual Education Plans (IEPs) provides an excellent example of how these questions are being addressed by professionals and families. IEPs of the past were often written in several distinct sections, each to be used by a different professional in a separate setting. As students with disabilities become full-time members of regular classrooms, and professionals and families work together, it is clear that the IEPs of yesterday no longer fit with the realities of inclusive education today.

Families and professionals are realizing the need for significant changes in the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans. The strong points of IEPs are being recognized, and the obsolete pieces are being discarded. While productive changes are happening, there still exists a growing frustration about the IEP process. Families, educators, and students continue to struggle to find ways in which IEPs can be written and implemented to respect the student as a typical member of the classroom and school community.

Often it seems much easier to critique what is "wrong" with an IEP than to describe how to make it better. Why is it that we can simply state what makes a "bad" IEP and yet struggle to explain what makes a "good" one? Perhaps it is because of our changing values and beliefs about the constitution of a quality education. Perhaps it reflects our struggle to balance the "special" and the "regular". Perhaps, in the context of inclusive classrooms, we are no longer sure where IEPs fit into the larger picture of a student's education.

Throughout the years, textbooks and manuals have been written about IEP legalities and technicalities. Hundreds of books and chapters are available to teach us how to write IEPs (...three out of four times on two consecutive data days), conduct IEP meetings (which specialist must be at which meeting...), and evaluate student progress on predetermined goals and objectives (present levels, dates for completion...). Bookstores and book-shelves overflow with guides and workbooks designed to teach us the mechanics of the IEP process.

This book does none of these things. This book is *not* designed to provide the reader with the nuts and bolts of the IEP process, nor will it provide the "how to's" of writing an IEP. Instead, it offers a mind-set, a new way of thinking about IEPs. Dotted with humor, this book provides guidelines for developing an IEP that respects the values of collaboration, student and family leadership, and full inclusion. May the pages that follow bring new wisdom and insight to those committed to rethinking the IEP process. And if not, at least a good laugh.



Developing An IEP Shouldn t Be Like Planning Someone Else s Vacation

❖❖❖

Developing An IEP Shouldn't Be Like Planning Someone Else's Vacation

Imagine a two week vacation, a wonderful chance to get away from it all. Imagine where you'd want to go, with whom you'd want to travel, how long you'd like to stay. Think about how you would spend your time. How would you travel from place to place? How much money would you spend? What would you need to pack to bring with you?

Now imagine that someone else -- without your input -- makes all of the plans. Someone else decides where you'll go, with whom you will travel, when you will leave, and for how long you will stay. Someone else determines how you will get there, what you will do, and how much money you will spend. Someone else makes every decision and sets the entire itinerary. Of course, it's a ridiculous proposition -- without your ideas and direction, you could be dreaming of a warm beach in Bermuda and wind up freezing on a ski slope in Colorado.

Now imagine a year of school -- a wonderful opportunity to learn new skills and new ideas. Think about what you would like to learn, where you would like to learn, and the people with whom you would like to spend time. Think about how you would spend your days. Now imagine that someone else makes all of these decisions and plans for you. This too is a ridiculous proposition, because without your ideas and direction, you might have a passion for Chemistry but wind up in Latin class learning to conjugate verbs.

Fortunately, it is quite rare for someone to plan your vacation without consulting you. Unfortunately, it is less rare for a school year to be planned without any direction from the person receiving the education.

Consider the IEP process. How often do educators make important decisions regarding what, where, when, and how a student with disabilities will learn -- without taking into consideration the thoughts and wishes of the student and his or her family?

Chances are, none of us would let someone else (even a professional) determine the location or the price of our next vacation. It just doesn't make sense. We might ask for assistance in planning our journey, but we would take the lead. The same should be true when educational plans are made for students. Guidance and assistance should be offered, but students and families must take the lead in setting the direction and the priorities for learning. If a student has difficulty communicating this information, friends and siblings can be asked to contribute their ideas.

To best ensure that the assistance of professionals in the planning process is meaningful, it is important that professionals really know the person for whom the plans are being made. Whether students in a classroom, or customers in a travel agency, procedures for getting to know someone must include more than tests, surveys, and questionnaires. Student reports and evaluations are records of where a student has been (what he or she has already learned), they are not necessarily records of where a student wants to go (future goals).

It is important to look past a student's label. School professionals involved in the planning process should be better acquainted with a student's dreams and wishes, than with a student's file. When a student is young -- preschool and elementary school age -- the family is in the best position to convey to the team their hopes and dreams for their child. As the student gets older -- middle and high school age --- the student naturally becomes the leader of the process. Goals and objectives that reflect the student's priorities are most meaningful.

At all stages -- from preschool through post-secondary -- the involvement of a student's peers is valuable to the IEP process. While professionals provide educational expertise, and parents provide their child's history and dreams, only friends and classmates offer the unique perspective of same-age peers. Including peers ensures that all goals and objectives will be age-appropriate and respectful of the regular classroom environment. Peers are not only valuable to the development of the IEP, but can also be involved in the implementation of the plan.

With leadership from the student, peers, and the family, educational plans are successfully developed. It is important that the starting point for educational plans always be the regular curriculum. Special accommodations and supports should be added only as necessary. (Imagine the outcry if a travel agent ordered vegetarian meals on the airplane for *all* of her customers!) In short, the IEP should reflect dreams and goals, and the ways in which the student will develop skills and knowledge within the context of the regular education classroom and curriculum.

Writing An IEP Shouldn't Be Like Five Decorators Furnishing Your Living Room

Writing An IEP Shouldn't Be Like Five Decorators Furnishing Your Living Room

It would be chaotic! One decorator might hang yellow and orange tiger-lily wallpaper while another, unknowingly, reupholsters the sofa in red plaid. Someone else might order an Oriental rug for the floor, not realizing that plans have been made to lay purple tiles. The last decorator may decide that what the room really needs is Shaker-style furniture.

The skills of each decorator may be excellent, but due to their lack of communication with one another, the living room is destined to look like a circus. The lilies might not be bad, and the red plaid might be quite lovely, but they just don't "go together" very well. All of the decorators are using their particular talent to create what they think will look best -- but they are failing to take into consideration the talents and skills of their fellow decorators. Worse yet -- they aren't looking at the *whole* living room, they care only about the part for which they are responsible.

Perhaps the reason for hiring five decorators in the first place was based upon the unique specialities of each one. Therefore, it would be unwise to give full responsibility for the living room to the decorator who's specialty is curtains, or to the one who has a knack for floors but knows little about wallpaper. The solution is not merely to reduce the number of decorators, for given all their diverse abilities, just imagine what the room could be. Instead it is important to make sure that everyone knows what everyone else is doing, and that all of the pieces fit well into the overall plan.

Sometimes writing IEPs is like decorating a living room. The educators, related service providers, parents, students, and assistants can be like decorators who need to communicate with one another. In the past, it was common for many professionals to each write one part of the IEP. The speech therapist wrote one set of goals, the special educator wrote a set of goals, and the physical therapist wrote yet another set of goals. Even if all of these goals were appropriate and meaningful, there was still the great risk that they wouldn't "go together" very well.

As with the decorators, it may not make sense to eliminate any of the team members. It is important to recognize the unique skills and perspectives each member brings to the team. However, without excellent ongoing communication, each contribution is compromised because no one is able to pay attention to the bigger picture -- the overall education of the student. IEPs need to be written cooperatively so that team members are best able to work together throughout the year. Red plaid and tiger lillies...would you want them in your living room?

Reading IEP Goals Shouldn't Be Like Reading The Manual For Programming Your VCR.

Reading IEP Goals Shouldn't Be Like Reading The Manual For Programming Your VCR

Your children are excited as you unpack the new VCR from its box. They are anxious to record their favorite television shows and you are excited about recording that early morning news program you miss while at work. The whole family is looking forward to taping and playing their favorite movies.

Now out of it's box, you connect the VCR to your television set. You and the children decide which t.v. show you'd like to record first. You pull out the programming manual. It is thick, and full of directions, diagrams, and flow charts. It is printed in small, hard-to-read type. You find the first step, but soon become frustrated because it is difficult to understand. You are tempted to just ignore the technical manual and try to program it using your own common sense, but on the box, in very bold letters, is a warning -- READ THIS MANUAL BEFORE OPERATING THIS VCR.

How many people have never quite figured out how to program their VCRs? Perhaps the reason for this is the technical manner in which the instruction manuals are written. Reading the manual can give the false perception that using the machine requires complicated technical knowledge. How many people are not quite sure how to read an IEP? Is it possible that IEPs are also written with unnecessary complexity? Are goals written using lengthy descriptors and technical jargon? Are objectives buried under piles of fifty-cent words and phrases?

Students' educational goals should not be written using technical words and directions -- they don't need to contain jargon. Yet, somehow, in the transition from thought to paper, goals that made sense when discussed at the IEP meeting, can seem foreign when written on paper. If parents and professionals are to work cooperatively, certainly all involved need to understand the meaning and intention of the goals. If even one person on the team is unclear as to what an objective means, it may be written too formally.

Using common everyday language to write IEP goals is an important priority. Making certain that goals truly make sense is another. It is far better to teach a student to throw a baseball in a real game with friends, than it is to teach him or her to throw a therapy ball with a therapist. Supporting a student's ability to read during a typical lesson is far more logical than teaching a student to identify sight words from a special reading program. The most meaningful IEP goals are those which are clearly written, and involve skills the student actually uses in school and/or at home.

For each IEP goal, it is valuable for teams to ask the question "Why was this goal written?". In response, the team should be able to explain how the goal will help the student be more successful in the classroom, school, home, or in the future. It is not enough to simply answer, "...because he or she cannot do it yet" or to indicate that the goal corresponds to an item on a standardized test. It is important that each and every goal included on a student's IEP is written to support the student's participation in typical school activities and everyday life.

IEPs should include meaningful goals that are not typically covered by the regular curriculum, *as well as* the regular curriculum content. "Functional skills" are important, yet there is probably no skill more "functional" in society today than literacy.

Lastly, if the VCR manual is eighty-seven pages long, it is unlikely many people will read it. The same is true for IEPs. They are best when kept to a reasonable length. An IEP shouldn't be longer than a dictionary-- or even longer than this book!

IEP Meetings Shouldn t Be Like Large Family Reunions

❖❖❖

IEP Meetings Shouldn't Be Like Large Family Reunions

It's a hot day in July. The burgers are on the grill, Aunt Rosie's famous potato salad is on the table, and all fifty-one members of the Ryan family are catching up on ten years. Everyone is gathered in the backyard, laughing at memories and showing off children. You have driven nine hours, with a trunk-full of photo albums and tins of your father's favorite cookies to attend this gathering.

Unfortunately, you have recently lost your job, and it seems that everyone has advice about what it is you should be doing with your life. "Words of wisdom" come from Aunt Rosie, Grandpa Ryan, and the like. They offer employment strategies, and don't hesitate to relate them to your past-- when you got fired at the pizza parlor, forgetting to feed the neighbor's cat. They all act as if they know you (and each other) far better than you know any of them. You know they are family, but they seem a bit like strangers.

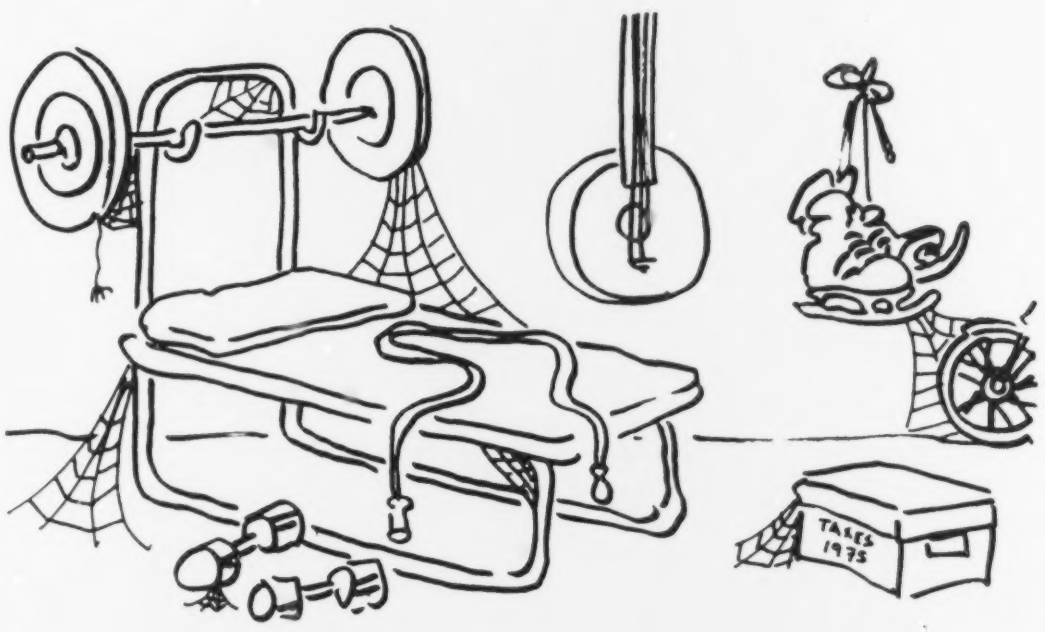
At first it seems unimaginable that an IEP meeting could resemble a family reunion. After all, it is rare to eat potato salad at an IEP meeting, and unlike family reunions, IEP meetings happen every year. But sometimes attending an IEP meeting feels similar to attending a family reunion. It can be a large (sometime too large) gathering of people -- only some of whom know each other very well. And far too often, someone who does not truly know the student is on hand to freely offer advice, strategies, and recommendations.

The most meaningful IEP meetings occur when educators and parents are well-acquainted, and all team members know the student well. While the IEP meeting is a time to discuss student progress and goals, communication between team members should occur throughout the entire year. For example, it is awkward for parents to listen to a physical therapist, whom they've never met, describe goals for their son or daughter. Teams that communicate regularly, and value the input of all team members, are best able to meet established IEP goals and objectives in regular education classrooms.

Many people believe that family reunions that begin on a Saturday afternoon, should be over by Sunday. (Sometimes in life, you *can* get too much of a good thing!) IEP meetings are also best when kept to a reasonable length of time. Nobody likes to sit through a five hour meeting, and after a certain point, little is accomplished. The most productive IEP meetings are short enough to enable all team members to participate throughout the entire meeting, and long enough to produce an excellent IEP. Several meetings can be scheduled if one meeting is not enough.

Often the reason for long IEP meetings is the formality with which the meetings are conducted. Paperwork regulations and obligations can seem to be more of a focus than the student. The most valuable IEP meetings occur when teams move beyond these barriers, and treat each other on an equal basis. If parents are introduced by their first names, then school staff also use first names. (It should not be a case of "Dr. Jones" and "Mom".) Formality and paperwork shouldn't stand in the way of comfortable dialogue and common sense.

Finally, it is always wise to begin an IEP meeting with the positive aspects of a student's educational growth. (Imagine if the discussion during the first hour of a family reunion was strictly focused on who lost a job, got divorced, or was arrested!) Although team members may have concerns that need to be addressed, these problems should not set the tone for the entire meeting. IEP meetings that begin with the good news, and then brainstorm ways to support what's "not working", are most successful. Future goals should always follow past successes.



Completed IEP's Shouldn't Be Like Exercise Equipment

Completed IEPs Shouldn't Be Like Exercise Equipment

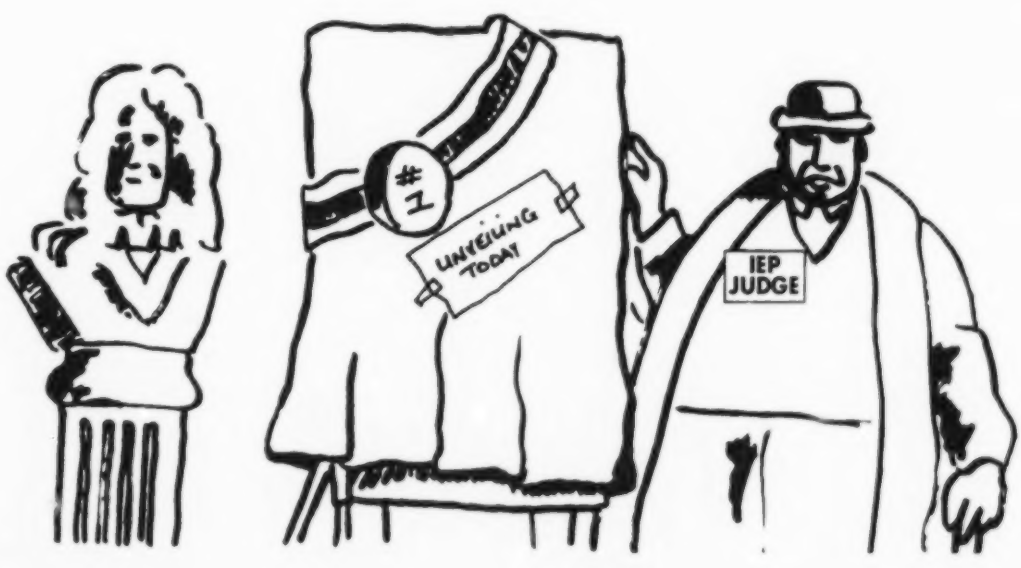
Everyone's done it. One day you wake up and decide that it's time to start exercising! You buy a few books about getting fit, contemplate jogging, consider joining a health club, and then realize what you need is an exercise bike! It will be perfect -- the bike will fit in the den, it can be used in all kinds of weather, and best of all, you can exercise in the privacy of your own home!

With a firm commitment, you shop for a bike, bring it home, and eagerly get started. Already, you feel more fit! You begin to use it everyday. If you are especially determined, you ride for a couple of months. But as time goes on, you begin to skip a day here and there. Before you know it, weeks have gone by since you last used the bike. Eventually, like most of us, your good intentions end up stored in the basement, as the exercise bicycle takes it's place among the unused furniture, toys, and boxes of clothing.

It's been said that good intentions and fifty-cents will get you a cup of coffee. It's not that good intentions can't lead to excellent outcomes, but too often they do not. Too often exercise equipment gets stored in the basement -- and too often IEPs get stored in the filing cabinet. Both exist because of good intentions, but they soon gather dust and cobwebs. Although IEPs may be developed with the best of intentions, teams sometimes stop short of following through with what they have set out to do. Effective IEPs are more than a record of intent, they are a plan of action.

When people come together at IEP meetings they make important decisions about a student's education. The intent is to set a clear direction for learning -- listing goals to be achieved along the way. But it is important to keep in mind that even the best educational teams cannot predict the future. Teams may state that a particular goal will be achieved by "May 15", but human beings do not always grow in predictable ways. It is essential that teams review the IEP often to be sure that the identified goals are still meaningful, and to determine whether it is necessary for new goals to be added.

Lastly, it is unlikely, even when seriously motivated, that you will carry the exercise bicycle upstairs from the basement each time you want to use it. The same is true for IEPs stored in the back of the filing cabinet -- or in a box on the highest shelf. For IEPs to be useful, they must be used. Therefore IEPs must be accessible, throughout the entire year, to all of the people involved with the student's education. Procedures to safeguard confidentiality should be respected, but IEPs are most useful when they are close at hand.



And Now Presenting The Perfect IEP...

❖❖❖

And Now Presenting The Perfect IEP . . .

A National Search Committee was formed with the single mission of discovering somewhere in the country, a perfect Individual Education Plan. Millions of parents and professionals responded by sending copies of their favorite IEPs. The Search Committee reviewed each and every entry, with the hope of choosing ten finalists, and finally one winner. The Search Committee is proud to present the *perfect* IEP...

Conclusion

Why is there no perfect IEP? Does a perfect IEP actually exist? Parents, educators, and students struggle to respond, and often find themselves answering these questions with another one: Is the IEP process still meaningful when students with disabilities are educated as full-time members of regular education classes? As schools begin to value all students as learners, they must look at the IEP process and decide how it best fits with these ideals.

The IEP process has long recognized each student as a unique individual with distinct abilities -- this is good. It has also labeled students according to their disabilities and conveyed messages of low expectations -- this is unacceptable. The IEP process has always viewed parents, students, and educators as team members -- this is good. But it has often devalued their contributions and this must change. For these reasons, it is important that the IEP process be included in the efforts of educational communities working to reform and restructure schools for *all* students.

What about the perfect IEP? Can it exist? Perhaps if the values of student and family leadership, collaborative teamwork, and full inclusion for all students fill each and every page, then a good -- even great -- IEP can be created. Today, the challenge for parents, students, and educators, is to write -- and use -- IEPs that *perfectly support* each student to fully participate and learn alongside friends and peers in regular education classes. If teams can do this, then the "perfect IEP" has been discovered.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of the students, parents, educators, and administrators in New Hampshire who contributed to this book. They generously shared with us their views, ideas, concerns, and humor about the IEP process. Their input has been most valuable.

55

About the Artist

Trevor Romain is the author and illustrator of ten books for children, including the best selling "Little People's Guide to the Big World". He lives in Austin, Texas and spends a lot of his time making children laugh.

Office for Training and Educational Innovations
The Institute on Disability/UAP
University of New Hampshire
The Concord Center - Box 14
10 Ferry Street
Concord, New Hampshire 03301
603-228-2084